

MHR *Connections*

Published by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission

Volume 10 Number 6-7

Summer 2010

Breaking down walls at historic event

by Roslyn Dally

The first gathering of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) saw over 18,000 people from across Canada and as far away as South America and Africa come together in Winnipeg, June 16-19, 2010 to learn, share and heal. The historic event marked a significant milestone on the long road to recovery that thousands of residential school system survivors and their descendents

are travelling. It was the first of seven national gatherings to be held over the next five years.

Two rainy and terribly windy days may have dampened the attendees and maybe even attendance numbers but certainly not the overall success of the four-day event.

To discover what really happened in the 150 year history of residential schools, organizers obtained over 1,000 confidential statements from those wishing to share their experience.

The media and members of the public witnessed heartfelt sentiments, in what was for many, the beginning of their healing process during the powerful Sharing Circles with the three TRC Commissioners.

The Learning Tent presented information through displays, photos, slide shows, and interactive maps. The map of Manitoba's residential school sites even allowed survivors and relatives to write their stories on the display.

The public shared their point of view on the Residential School System and what they've learned by participating in the event at the Sharing Corner.

The event also offered participants the opportunity to enjoy cultural exhibitions by First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups, film screenings, plays, art exhibits, and several musical performances.

Governor General Michaëlle Jean took part in the last day of the event where she offered tobacco to a sacred fire, engaged in a traditional smudging ceremony, participated in a

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The Rights Connections by Roslyn Dally - MHRC Intern From My Perspective

As a Métis woman, raised in a middle-class French Roman Catholic family, I was intrigued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Event held recently in Winnipeg. Like many, I was drawn to The Forks to witness this historic occurrence.

Through my work in the Aboriginal community, I began to understand the profound and long-lasting impact that the residential school system had on generations of families. I also discovered the traditional values of respect and sharing that form the foundation of the Aboriginal way. These concepts immediately resonated within me. My experiences also led me to question the marginalization of Canada's First Nations people.

During the opening ceremonies of the TRC Event, it was humbling to stand among these resilient people while they listened to dozens of elders, native leaders, church officials and politicians offer apologies, promises and symbolic gestures. It was even more humbling to shed tears along with these courageous people as they shared how the residential school system tried to destroy their culture because of their race, language, and spiritual beliefs.

Prime Minister Harper's apology in June 2008 shows Canadians have come a long way in reconciling the systemic discrimination of Aboriginal people. The lineups at the survivors' registration tents prove there is still much work to be done. The strength and support that the survivors, their families, former staff, and government officials offered each other proves the resolution of this tragedy will be found in the truth of the history of residential schools. To find the truth, the TRC is listening, honouring and respecting the voices, which in many cases, until now, have never been heard.

Respect, diversity, and equality are the foundations of human rights in Manitoba.

If the harmony, tenderness and hope felt throughout this gathering are any indication of the progress we've made as a society, perhaps we are one step closer to bridging the divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. Perhaps, we are witnessing a miracle that is going to transform Canada into a country where all children have the same opportunities.

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youth sharing circle, and kicked off a big pow wow. RCT Chairman, Justice Murray Sinclair, gifted Her Excellency with a colourful traditional shawl for serving as the TRC's first honorary witness. She was asked to wear the shawl whenever she appears at TRC events.

As the initial TRC event gained momentum, it became apparent that these gatherings are not just about victims, oppressors or cultural activities. They are about giving Canadians an opportunity to heal, a sense of hope, and the ability to move forward, together. Justice Sinclair said it best, when he said: "It was through education that they took this away, and it is through education we will give it back."

Unsung heroes take centre stage

"The museum will reflect the many unsung heroes who took a stand for their family, friends and community," said Stuart Murray, CEO of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights at the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies (CASHRA).

Mr. Murray acknowledged that every human rights commission in the country is aware of these unsung, human rights heroes and have passed their stories to the museum.

Mr. Murray said that over 2,000 people from across Canada made submissions to the museum committee. "There are stories of survival, triumph and celebration; many tough stories that make up our human rights history," he said but also made it clear that the museum was about "human rights, not human wrongs."

During his twenty minute address, Mr. Murray congratulated the Asper family; Izzy Asper for his vision and his daughter Gail, for her commitment to the project. "We are continuing to work hard to make this dream a reality," he said.

Youth is one of the most important parts of the museum's education plans, and Mr. Murray also congratulated the Manitoba Human Rights Commission on its work with young people, especially its youth conferences.

The 2010 CASHRA Conference "The Edge of Rights Awareness" took place between June 20 and 23, 2010 in St. John's Newfoundland. The participants at the conference also had an opportunity to attend many challenging workshops including Housing as a Human Right, Mental Health Issues in Canada and Workplace Drug and Alcohol Testing.

Patricia Knipe, Communications Director for the Manitoba Human Rights Commission was one of the featured speakers at a plenary session called "Recapturing Public Opinion: How to communicate the values of Human Rights Commissions." Ms Knipe was joined by David Cochrane, CBC Provincial Affairs Reporter, Christa Steeves, SPARK Marketing Partner and Kevin Marsh, Manager of Communications and Issues Management of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

And finally, laughter replaced serious discussions when Mark Critch, the Host of the comedy TV program *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, entertained everyone with his impersonations of CBC Commentator Rex Murphy and Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams.

Queen Elizabeth II unveils cornerstone of museum

Dianna Scarth, Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission was among the invited guests to witness the unveiling of the cornerstone at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The event took place on Saturday July 3, 2010 at the Forks in Winnipeg. An embedded stone was taken from a meadow in Runnymede England where King John signed the historic Magna Carta in 1215. Many people visited the Commission's display booth before the arrival of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh, who later attended a brief concert by some of Winnipeg's talented artists at the Scotia Stage.



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in Winnipeg.

New publication released during Pride Week



Deborah Cox, award-winning Canadian R&B star was the Pride headliner. She had the crowd dancing for over 20 minutes with her high energy performance.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission again participated in Pride Mart and launched the Commission's most recent publication *Protections from discrimination based on gender identity*. Two hundred booklets were handed out in addition to website cards. This was the first year Pride Mart was held at the Forks and it drew a much larger crowd. According to organizers, 10,000 people took part in the city's biggest-ever Winnipeg

Pride parade and festivities celebrating the city's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and two-spirit (GLBTT) community.

Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba has new Commissioner

In June 2010, James Brook Wilson was appointed by the federal government as Commissioner for the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba. Mr. Wilson will serve as Commissioner until March 31, 2011.

Mr. Wilson has extensive experience in the field of education. In 2008, he graduated with a Masters in Education Administration from the University of Manitoba. Since graduating, he has worked as the Director of Education for the Opaskwayak Education Authority Inc.

Mr. Wilson is the TRCM's second Commissioner. Dennis White Bird, an Anishinabae from the Rolling River First Nation was the first Commissioner of the TRCM. He was appointed in June 2005.